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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: (S) NOT THE CONTE I KNOW

REF: CONAKRY 0068

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (S) During a March 12 meeting with Poloff, opposition leader Sidya Toure of the Union Force Republican (UFR) party shared his observations regarding his Monday courtesy call on President Lansana Conte. Toure said that it was the first time he had seen Conte in over eight years and that Conte had significantly changed for the worse, both physically and mentally. According to Toure, both of Conte,s legs were black and swollen, suggesting complications related to his diabetes. In addition, Conte,s hand reportedly trembled throughout the meeting, and at one point, he struggled to light a cigarette. Toure said he joked with him about his continued smoking habit to which Conte reportedly waved his hand dismissively and said that it was a mild brand. Toure told Poloff that &this is not the Conte I know, the old Conte would have asked me who the hell I was to question him.8

¶2. (S) Toure made the courtesy call in order to offer condolences for the death of the president,s brother last week. He said that the meeting lasted about thirty minutes, but lacked substance, focusing mostly on exchanging pleasantries. Toure said that he did not think Conte was capable of discussing more serious matters and questioned the state of Conte,s mental health. Toure noted that he owns a plantation next to some property of Conte,s and that Conte asked him about the plantation at least five different times during the conversation. &He did not even remember that he had already asked me about it,8 Toure said.

¶3. (S) In response to a question about decision making within the presidency, Toure said that Conte is not capable of making decisions and members of his inner circle are likely responsible for recent presidential decisions. At one point, Toure said &one of the drivers or gardeners could come in and get him to sign something if they tried.8 Toure added that various animals, including chicken, sheep, and goats, were milling about in front of the president, which is something the &old Conte8 would not have tolerated.

¶4. (S) Toure told Poloff that the man he saw &was not Conte.8 He said that Conte was really a different man, clearly &tired and finished.8 Toure added that if the country ends up facing a situation similar to that of January/February 2007, the president does not have the capacity to effectively manage it.

COMMENT

¶5. (S) Toure seemed genuinely shocked by Conte,s apparent

deterioration. In a January meeting with Poloff, when asked about who might be behind presidential decision making, Toure said that no one represents the president, but the president (reftel). Seeing the man in person after eight years appears to have dramatically changed Toure,s assessment. It was also clear that Toure,s impressions of the president,s physical and mental wellbeing will likely figure into his overall political calculations as he and others pursue a parallel dialogue and search for a common strategy to achieve change (to be reported septel). Toure indicated several times that the president is no longer capable of quelling possible resistance movements. END COMMENT.
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